

9/28/20 Wires

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US Anticipates Rise in Novel Coronavirus Cases Soon Amid Increased Testing - Pence

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Americans should expect an increase in the number of novel coronavirus cases in the near future, Vice President Mike Pence said at a white House event n Monday.

"With cases in positivity rising in ten states in the Midwest and the near west and with this historic advance in testing that's being distributed 150 [million] strong around the country, Mr. President, the American people should anticipate that cases will rise in the days ahead," Pence said.

The United State has reached "a steady progress" in achieving a safe and effective vaccine, Pence also said, adding the great cooperation between public and private sectors.

As of Monday afternoon, the US authorities have reported more than 7 million of cases and more almost 205,000 virus-related deaths, according to data compiled by the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center.

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US States to Receive 150Mln COVID-19 Test Kits to Support Opening of Schools - Trump

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in a press conference on Monday that his administration is sending 150 million rapid test kits for the novel coronavirus throughout the United States to support the reopening of the US states' economies and schools.

"We're announcing our plan to distribute 150 million Abbott rapid point-of-care tests in the coming weeks," Trump said.

A 100 million test kits will be used by states to support efforts to reopen their economies and schools immediately, he said.

Trump added that 50 million test kits will go to vulnerable communities, such as the elderly in nursing homes and hospice care agencies, and 1 million test kits will go to historically black colleges and tribal nation colleges.

The United States has reported more than 7.1 million novel coronavirus cases and more than 204,900 deaths caused by the disease as of Monday afternoon, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

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UN Chief Urges Immediate Ceasefire in Talks With Azerbaijan, Armenia Leaders - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has now spoken to both, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and urged them to immediately establish a ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and return to negotiations, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on Monday. "The Secretary-General spoke today with H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and with H.E. Mr. Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia," Dujarric said. "He urged both leaders to take immediate steps to establish a ceasefire and resume negotiations in order to prevent instability in the region."

Dujarric said the UN Secretary-General expressed grave concern over the recent clashes in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone.

Guterres also emphasized the need for both countries to work with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to return immediately to negotiations without preconditions, Dujarric added.

Since 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been engaged in a conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority region that proclaimed independence from what was the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.

On Sunday morning, clashes occurred in Nagorno Karabakh with both sides accusing the other of carrying out provocations. Armenia declared martial law and general mobilization, while Azerbaijan declared partial martial law and partial mobilization. Azerbaijan has closed its airports to all international air traffic except from Turkey, which has pledged support to Baku.

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Universal Healthcare Services Hospital Chain in US Goes Offline Due to Cyberattack

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The US hospital chain Universal Healthcare Services announced in a statement on Monday that it has gone offline after being a subject to a cyberattack, but its patient care operations have not been affected.

"The IT Network across Universal Health Services (UHS) facilities is currently offline, due to an IT security issue," the statement said.

The Universal Healthcare Services explained that it is using back-up procedures, including offline documentation methods, while work is underway to restore online operations.

"Patient care continues to be delivered safely and effectively. No patient or employee data appears to have been accessed, copied or misused," the statement said.

An employee familiar with the company's response efforts said the cyberattack looks and smells like ransomware and is one of the largest medical cyberattacks in the United States, according to media reports.

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Republicans Ask US Supreme Court to Halt Mail-In Voting Extension in Pennsylvania - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Senate Republican Caucus of the Pennsylvania legislature has asked the US Supreme Court to halt the decision by the state's highest court to extend the deadline to receive mail-in ballots while they work on filing an appeal, a court document revealed on Monday.

On September 16, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decided to extend the mail-in ballot deadline in the state to November 6 - three days after Election Day.

"Applicants respectfully request this Court grant a stay of the portions of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania's decision: (1) forcing election officials to accept ballots received after Election Day to be counted even if they lack a legible postmark; and, (2) extending the absentee and mail-in ballot deadline past Election Day, pending the disposition of Applicants' forthcoming petition for writ of certiorari," the filing said.

The Senate Republican Caucus argues the Pennsylvania Supreme Court violated US federal law and the Constitution by extending the deadline for mail-in ballots.

The group also claims the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision will facilitate voter fraud.

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US, UK Chief Science Advisors Discuss COVID-19 Research Cooperation - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Senior science advisors from the United States, United Kingdom and Ireland met virtually on Monday to discuss research cooperation on the novel coronavirus as well as other matters, according to a joint statement.

"Science Foundation Ireland, UK Research and Innovation and the US National Science Foundation look forward to leveraging the research strengths of each country to enhance capabilities needed to transform infectious disease outbreak prediction and prevention," the statement said.

All participants reiterated their commitment to strengthen the already strong partnership to prevent future outbreaks, provide rapid detection, analysis, modeling and countermeasures, the statement also said.

"The meetings follow conversations among chief scientific advisors earlier this year and represent the continued commitment of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States to strengthening international cooperation to address the world's most pressing research and development (R&D) challenges," the statement added.

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Nearly 280,000 Children in US Contracted Coronavirus Since March - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Nearly 280,000 children in the United States contracted the novel coronavirus since March, making up less than 5 percent of the country's cases, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a study on Monday. "Since March, 277,285 COVID-19 cases in children have been reported," the CDC said. "Although mortality and hospitalization in school-aged children was low, Hispanic ethnicity, Black race, and underlying conditions were more commonly reported among children who were hospitalized or admitted to an ICU, providing additional evidence that some children might be at increased risk for severe illness associated with COVID-19."

The CDC said the analysis of demographic characteristics, underlying conditions, clinical outcomes and trends in the study could help policy-makers make "decisions about in-person learning and the timing and scaling of community mitigation measures."

However, the CDC said the findings in the study were subject to limitations such as data that might underestimate the actual incidence of disease among school-aged children, because testing was frequently prioritized for persons with symptoms and asymptomatic infection in children was common.

Findings on race/ethnicity, symptom status, underlying conditions and outcomes need to be interpreted with caution as these data had high rates of missing or unknown values, the CDC said.

Due to delays in reporting, trend data might also lag actual disease transmission dates, and laboratory data covered in the study might under represent the volume of laboratory tests reported in some states, the CDC added.

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Canadian Accused of Sending Ricin to Trump to Remain in Custody, Face Trial in Washington

TORONTO, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Canadian woman suspected of sending a ricin-laced letter to US President Donald Trump will remain in custody until she is transferred to the District of Columbia to stand trial, a US Magistrate Judge ruled on Monday.

The defendant, Pascale Cecile Veronique Ferrier, entered on a not guilty plea during the hearing in Buffalo, New York.

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Canadian Woman Suspected of Sending Ricin-Laced Letter to Trump Pleads 'Not Guilty'

TORONTO, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Canadian woman suspected of sending a ricin-laced letter to US President Donald Trump entered on Monday a not guilty plea in a Buffalo, New York courtroom to making threats against him.

The defendant, Pascale Cecile Veronique Ferrier, who was charged after the FBI intercepted her ricin-laced letter addressed to the White House, chose to have her identity hearing waived.

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Wife of Late Senator John McCain to Join Biden's Presidential Transition Team - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Cindy McCain, widow of the late Senator John McCain, will join Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's transition team, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

McCain, a Republican, will serve as an adviser to Biden to help him plan for a possible presidency, the report said.

McCain is the second Republican to join the board of Biden's presidential transition team.

Republican Robert McDonald, who served as Secretary of Veterans Affairs during the Obama administration, will also be an adviser on the former vice president's transition team.

The first of the three presidential debates between Trump and Biden is scheduled to take place on Tuesday evening in Cleveland, Ohio.

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Cleveland Authorities Say Will Implement Safe Perimeter During US Presidential Debate

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Cleveland city authorities said on Monday that they will maintain a safe perimeter around the venue where the first presidential debate will be held and will prevent any distractions during the much anticipated showdown between the incumbent Donald Trump and his rival Joe Biden.

Cleveland will host on Tuesday evening the first of three presidential debates at Case Western Reserve University.

"This is a historical debate... What our job to do is to minimize all those distractions that may occur that wouldn't allow for people who are viewing debate to really get this essence of two candidates," Mayor Frank Jackson said during a press briefing.

The Cleveland authorities close the roads adjacent to the debate venue and have created a list of items like fireworks and large bag packs that will be prohibited in the area from Monday noon till early Wednesday.

"I assure the citizens of Cleveland that we have taken every precaution to make sure that people who wish to exercise their first amendment free speech right can do it in a safe and secure manner," Cleveland Director of Public Safety Karrie Howard said.

Cleveland Police Chief Calvin Williams told reporters that federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, including the Secret Service and the FBI, have worked tirelessly for the last month and a half to make sure that "this thing comes off."

"We have plenty of assets," Williams said and urged residents to report to the police even minor suspicions.

The state of Ohio said it has activated its National Guard reaction force "to support law enforcement, protect life and preserve property during the presidential debate."

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Over 60 Countries Back 2030 Biodiversity Protection Pledge Ahead of UN Summit

TORONTO, September 28 (Sputnik) - Political leaders from more than 60 countries, including Canada, the European Union and the United Kingdom, committed to protect biodiversity in a pledge released on Monday.

The announcement comes ahead of a summit being convened by the president of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday that will discuss "Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development."

"We, political leaders participating in the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity, representing 64 countries from all regions and the European Union, have come together today, on 28 September 2020, ahead of the Summit to send a united signal to step up global ambition for biodiversity and to commit to matching our collective ambition for nature, climate and people with the scale of the crisis at hand," the leaders said in a joint statement.

In an address earlier on Monday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that Ottawa is committed to protecting 25% of the country's land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030. The prime minister also called on the rest of the world's ten largest countries to join the pledge. The United Kingdom also committed to protecting 30% of its land by 2030, the Office of Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a statement.

The commitment charts a science-based course to protect ecosystems and biodiversity through international collaboration and work with indigenous peoples, according to the communique.

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Armenian Mission Says Unable to Confirm Emergency UNSC Meeting on Karabakh on Tuesday

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations told Sputnik it cannot confirm that an emergency meeting at the UN Security Council has been scheduled for Tuesday to discuss the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

"There is no confirmation of such a meeting," the mission said on Monday when asked whether the council will address the most recent clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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Germany, European Countries to Request UNSC Discussion on Karabakh for Tuesday - Source

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - Germany and European countries will request an emergency UN Security Council meeting for Tuesday to discuss the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, a diplomatic source at the United Nations told Sputnik on Monday.

"Germany and European countries at the UN Security Council are going to request a discussion on Karabakh for Tuesday," the source said.

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UN Can Not Confirm Turkey Sending Mercenaries to Karabakh - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has no information to confirm or deny the reports that Turkey is sending mercenaries to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zone between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and has no means to check whether they are true, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"We have no information to the veracity of this claim and many other claims they are being made," Dujarric said. "We have no way to check them. We've seen in press reports different claims made different parties. One of the important things is to get OSCE monitors back on the ground."

Earlier on Monday, Yasin Aktay - an aide to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan - told Sputnik that Turkey considers it unnecessary to deploy either its military or opposition fighters from Syria to the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Armenian Ambassador to Russia Vardan Toghanyan told Sputnik in an interview that Turkey had sent Syrian militants to take part in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov told Sputnik earlier in the day Armenia's claims that Baku was using mercenaries in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict were groundless.

Azerbaijan officials claimed that mercenaries from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries were engaged to fight on Armenia's side.

Tensions escalated in Nagorno-Karabakh on Sunday morning with both sides accusing each other of carrying out provocations. Armenia and the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh republic declared martial law and general mobilization, while Azerbaijan declared partial martial law and partial mobilization. Azerbaijan has shut down its airports to all international air traffic except for Turkey, which has pledged full solidarity with Baku.

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Canada 'Disappointed' By US Decision to Appeal WTO Ruling on Lumber Imports - Statement

TORONTO, September 28 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is disappointed by the United States' decision to appeal a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling that largely sided with Canada in a dispute over lumber trade between the two neighboring nations, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade Mary Ng said in a statement on Monday.

Last month, the WTO ruled that US duties imposed on Canadian lumber products were unreasonable after the United States failed to prove that the price of exported lumber was artificially low due to the provincial government subsidies.

"Canada is disappointed that the United States decided to appeal last month's WTO panel report, which found the countervailing duties against Canada to be inconsistent with the United States' WTO obligations," Ng said.

The minister added that her government will work "tirelessly" to protect Canada's forestry industry.

The two neighbors have been at disagreement at the WTO for decades over duties imposed on lumber. In 2006, the sides reached a settlement under which the United States agreed to suspend its duties. The deal expired in 2015 and the administration of US President Donald Trump, who took power two years later, has subsequently imposed new tariffs on Canadian lumber, prompting a new dispute.

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UN Chief Urges Azerbaijan, Armenia to Immediately Stop Fighting in Karabakh - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Azerbaijan and Armenia to immediately halt fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh and resume meaningful negotiations, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"The Secretary-General just advised me that he just spoke to the President of Azerbaijan [Ilham Aliyev] and he will be speaking very shortly with the Prime Minister of Armenia [Nikol Pashinyan]," Dujarric said. "He delivered in his phone conversation the same message, which he had in the statement, to the president of Azerbaijan, meaning the need for an immediate stop

to the fighting and resumption without any condition[s] of meaningful negotiations without delay under the umbrella of the Minsk Group Co-chairs, and also for the immediate redeployment of OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] monitors to the region. And he will say exactly the same thing to the Prime Minister of Armenia."

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US Appealing WTO Ruling on Canadian Lumber Imports - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is appealing a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling that sided with Canada in a dispute over the two nations' lumber trade, the WTO said in a statement on Monday.

Last month, the WTO ruled that US duties imposed on Canadian lumber products were unreasonable after Washington failed to prove that the price of exported lumber was artificially low due to the provincial government subsidies.

"The United States notified the Dispute Settlement Body on 28 September 2020 of its decision to appeal the panel report in the case brought by Canada in "United States - Countervailing Measures on Softwood Lumber from Canada," the statement said.

The two neighbors have disagreed in the WTO for decades over tariffs imposed on lumber. In 2006, the two countries reached a settlement under which the United States agreed to suspend its tariffs on Canadian lumber. The deal expired in 2015 and the administration of US President Donald Trump, who took power two years later, subsequently re-imposed the tariffs, prompting a new dispute.

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Trump Says He Paid 'Many Millions of Dollars' in Taxes But Was Entitled to Tax Credits

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Monday that he paid "many millions of dollars" in taxes and was entitled to depreciation and tax credits after the New York Times reported over the weekend that he contributed just \$750 yearly in taxes for 2016 and 2017, his first year in the White House.

"I paid many millions of dollars in taxes but was entitled, like everyone else, to depreciation and tax credits," Trump said via Twitter. "Also, if you look at the extraordinary assets owned by me, which the Fake News hasn't, I am extremely under leveraged - I have very little debt compared to the value of assets."

The report said Trump paid no income taxes at all in ten of the previous 15 years largely because he reported losing more money than he made. The report also said Trump used the proceeds of his celebrity to purchase and prop up risky businesses and wielded their losses to avoid taxes.

The report also said the US president was locked in a decade-long audit battle with the Internal Revenue Service over the legitimacy of a \$72.9 million tax refund that he claimed, and received, after declaring huge losses, adding that an adverse ruling could cost him more than \$100 million.

Trump said much of what the report said was information already on file and emphasized that he had said he "may release financial statements, from the time I announced I was going to run for president, showing all properties, assets and debts."

In 2016, Trump promised prior to his White House run to release his financial information but did not do so. Prosecutors in New York, Trump's former state of residence, tried to obtain the records on grounds that he may have committed tax fraud.

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Pompeo Says He Expects More US Technology Investments in Greece

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Monday that he expects more US technology investments in Greece.

"American businesses make decisions on their own; we don't operate like other countries do.

These aren't state-sponsored enterprises that come, pillage and destroy your economy,"

Pompeo said. "These are American companies who come and hire Greek citizens and educate and train and build up good, reliable partners in communities like this. I have every expectation that you'll see more investment, more technology investment."

Pompeo said a good example of how US companies can come to Greece and work with the country's small businesses are the giants Cisco and Pfizer.

"I anticipate we'll see more," Pompeo added. "I don't want to get ahead of any final decisions, but I think the people of this region can fully expect if they do the right things, if they are welcoming, you'll see more American investment here, which would be great for each of our two countries."

Asked whether he sees Thessaloniki as an emerging technology hub, Pompeo said, "I expect that it will be."

Pompeo is currently on a working visit to Greece as part of his week-long tour in Europe's eastern Mediterranean region that involve trips to Italy, Croatia and the Vatican.

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US Adding American International Services to Cuba Restricted List - State Dept.

(Updates with additional information in paras 4, 5; background in paras 6, 7)

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States has added American International Services (AIS) to the Cuba Restricted List, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Monday.

"Today, the Department of State is adding American International Services (AIS) to the Cuba Restricted List," Pompeo said. "AIS is a financial institution controlled by the Cuban military that processes remittances sent to the Cuban people. The Cuban military also uses AIS, its parent company FINCIMEX, and other entities to charge fees and manipulate the remittance and foreign currency market as part of the regime's schemes to make money and support its repressive apparatus."

Pompeo pointed out that AIS's earned profits "disproportionately benefit the Cuban military, furthering repression of the Cuban people and funding Cuba's meddling in Venezuela."

The move furthers the Trump administration's goal of preventing the Cuban military from controlling and benefiting from the flow of remittances that should instead benefit the Cuban people, Pompeo said.

"The people should be able to receive funds from their family abroad without having to line the pockets of their oppressors. We urge anyone who sends remittances to family in Cuba to use means other than Cuban government-controlled remittance entities," Pompeo added.

Monday's announcement follows the United States' latest round of sanctions against Cuba last week that prohibited Americans from lodging or paying for third parties to lodge at any property owned or controlled by the Cuban government, prohibited Cuban officials or their close relatives. In addition, the Trump administration banned Cuban alcohol and tobacco products from being imported in the United States.

Cuba's mission to the United Nations said in a statement on Friday that The Trump administration's latest sanctions against Cuba are an attempt to win votes from some Cubans in the United States in the upcoming November 3 presidential election.

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WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump said on Monday he paid 'many millions of dollars' in taxes and was entitled to depreciation and tax credits after the New York Times reported that he contributed just \$750 each for 2016 as well as 2017, his first year in the White House.

"I paid many millions of dollars in taxes but was entitled, like everyone else, to depreciation & tax credits," Trump said in a series of tweets, responding to the Times expose on Sunday of his tax and financial statements. "Also, if you look at the extraordinary assets owned by me, which the Fake News hasn't, I am extremely under leveraged - I have very little debt compared to the value of assets."

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US, Greece Call for Peaceful Resolution of East Mediterranean Disputes - State Dept

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Greek Foreign Minister Nikolaus-Georgios Dendias have agreed on the need to peacefully resolve any maritime disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, State Department spokesperson Cale Brown said on Monday in a readout of a meeting between the two diplomats in Greece.

"They also agreed on the need for peaceful resolution of any disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean in accordance with international law, and the Secretary welcomed all efforts to deescalate tensions and return to dialogue," Brown said after Pompeo and Dendias held talks earlier in the day in Thessaloniki.

Tensions escalated in the region last month as Turkish seismic exploration vessels conducted surveys in waters that both Greece and Cyprus claim to be part of their exclusive economic zones. The Greek armed forces were put on high alert as Turkey's Oruc Reis vessel conducted surveys near the island of Kastellorizo, which is owned by Greece but located just one mile from the Turkish coast.

During their meeting, Pompeo and Dendias also discussed cooperation on energy diversification and infrastructure projects, as well as defense matters, the spokesperson said. "Secretary Pompeo noted Thessaloniki's important regional role as a gateway to the Balkans and welcomed Greece's leadership in advancing the Transatlantic and European integration of the Western Balkans," Brown said.

Both sides also committed to "further enhance their strategic defense and security partnership" during upcoming Strategic Dialogue talks in Washington in 2021, the statement said.

The two sides also pledged to step up cooperation on counter-terrorism information sharing and trade cooperation, the statement said.

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US, South Korea to Hold High-Level Arms Talks in Washington – Billingslea

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – The United States and South Korea plan to hold a high-level arms control talks in Washington, US Special Representative for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea confirmed on Monday.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said earlier that Billingslea reached the agreement on hosting high-level arms control talks during his meeting in Seoul earlier in the day with Deputy Foreign Minister Ham Sang-wook.

"Detailed discussion with Deputy Foreign Minister Ham Sang-wook," Billingslea said of the meeting via Twitter. "Important to share with our Korean allies information on China's rapid nuclear weapons & missile buildup, and how to counter. Looking forward to hosting in Washington!"

The Foreign Ministry in Seoul said the high-level talks would be held "as soon as possible" and the two sides would step up communication on arms control and non-proliferation.

Billingslea arrived in Seoul on Sunday for a two-day visit reportedly aimed at pressing for the deployment of medium and intermediate-range missiles in Asia to counter China's military buildup.

In an interview with Yonhap News Agency ahead of his visit, Billingslea also said he would share "additional intelligence" with South Korea on the rapid development of Chinese military programs.